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A.P United States History

Period: 4

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“America is Rich, American is Rich”

After 1880 and near the turn of the century, millions of immigrants from across the world, mostly from Europe (more and more immigrants from southern and eastern Europe than before), North and South America, and Asia traveled to the “great” America in search of a new life and money. It was said that the United States offered many jobs and a ton of land; opening new opportunity to anyone. With this being said, there was a mad rush of people between 1840 and 1900. Unfortunately the immigrants found out the hard way that the United States did not in fact provide all of these great things; not as easy as they thought anyway.

“I dreamed of golden stairs leading to the top of the American palace where father was supposed to live” (Document 3). This short quote from an anonymous immigrant girl basically sums up what most immigrants from around the world thought of the United States before they arrived. “…because Italy didn’t have no work. Mama used to say, ‘America is rich, America is rich’”(Document 6). This came from Carla Martinelly, who moved to America in search of a husband, and a wonderful life. The hopes and dreams of people traveling across the vast oceans is almost unimaginable. America was said to be the land of opportunity; all of these immigrants must have misinterpreted this because “land of opportunity” didn’t necessarily mean opportunity to all.

Unfortunately, there are many more accounts of the grim reality these people faced when they arrived in the United States. Constantine Panunzio; arrived in the ‘states in 1902, talked about when he first arrived in New York and a man approached him and offered Constantine a “can’t miss” job opportunity. So of course Constantine accepted the offer, and found out soon after that he worked to much for such little pay. The work left him with “sore arms and backs”(Document 2).

Another account tells about a health inspector’s point of view; he refers to the tenements as “dens of death”. He describes these residencies-“into which the sunlight never enters… that are dark, damp, dismal throughout all the days of the year, and for which it is no-exaggeration to say that the money paid to the owners as rent is literally the ‘price of blood’”. He describes all of the negatives in the tenements including how the bedrooms are always dark and are nothing better than closets; not even any simple ventilation. (Document 4)

A cartoon shows Chinese immigrants pulling down a latter of which they just came in from. This resembles how they so badly tried to get into America, but once they did they advised the Chinese back in China to stay home. The United States was overloaded and couldn’t supply any more “great” opportunity (Document 7). Some hardships of Italian immigrants are described by Cosma Tangora Sullivan, he writes how he was always ashamed of being foreign, and how he tried hiding it from guests at his house (Document 9). The Chinese didn’t have it easy either, as Gim Chang explains, “I myself rarely left Chinatown… The area around Union Square was a dangerous place for us… Once we were inside Chinatown, the thugs didn’t bother us”. The Chinese were one race that was spit on between 1880 and about 1910.

With word of grand opportunity in America, million fled here. Only to be disappointed and live a much harder life than the one they left behind. With uncomfortable living conditions, hard labor, little money, and racism, the immigrants that came here persevered and made America what it is today. It’s actually a pretty demanding challenge to find someone here today that isn’t related to an immigrant from that time period. We should all truly be thankful that these people kept pushing through the worst of times, or life wouldn’t be nearly the same today.